

THE DAUGHTER OF BRABANTIO.

BY RICHARD DICKINS.

(Continued from page 34.)

THE second Act (and indeed the remainder of the play) passes in Cyprus. The storm which is raging has dispersed the hostile fleet, the "wars are done, the Turks are drowned," but Othello, Desdemona, Cassio and Iago land in safety, and when husband and wife meet after enduring the perils of the ocean, we see them at the pinnacle of their brief happiness and marvellously is the scene drawn for us and beautiful is Othello's greeting of his young wife—

"It gives me wonder great as my content
To see you here before me. O my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!
And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas
Olympus-high and duck again as low
As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."

Then follows the successful commencement of Iago's plot. Cassio, the man placed over his head, and trusted by Othello with the care of the town during the first night after his arrival, is encouraged to drink, in a drunken brawl attacks the late governor, Montano, and in the ensuing uproar Othello is aroused and we get our first glimpse of the inner nature of the semi-civilized barbarian when he exclaims—

"Now by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule;
And passion having my best judgment collied
Assays to lead the way."

Cassio is degraded and after uttering the finest tirade ever written against wine and its misuse, is persuaded by Iago to

make suit to Desdemona to use her influence for his reinstatement. Through the Act we listen to Iago's suspicions, and his muttered plans sound like the distant thunder heralding the fast approaching storm. We hear that his suspicion of the Moor and his wife has strengthened, "The thought whereof," he says, "doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards; and nothing can or shall content my soul till I am even'd with him, wife for wife, or failing so, yet that I put the Moor at least into a jealousy so strong that judgment cannot cure."

By the end of the Act all is ready only

"Two things are to be done:
My wife must move, for Cassio to her mistress
I'll set her on;
Myself the while to draw the Moor apart
And bring him jump when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife."

Shakespeare ever careless of details, opens the third Act, on the morning following the drunken brawl, and this we cannot but think a mistake, the time since marriage being too short to permit of jealousy entering into even Othello's mind. Through this play, however, Shakespeare ignores possibilities, so far as time is concerned. The first scene need only be noted for Emilia's speech to Cassio—

"I am sorry
For your displeasure; but all will sure be well.
The general and his wife are talking of it;
And she speaks for you stoutly: the Moor replies,
That he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus
And great affinity and that in wholesome wisdom
He might not but refuse you, but he protests he loves you
And needs no other suitor but his likings
To take the safest occasion by the front
To bring you in again."

Our opinion as to Othello's judgment of men's characters is confirmed, for even after so flagrant a breach of trust and duty as Cassio's, and within a few hours of it, he has determined to reinstate him. We also notice (at the commencement of Scene 3) that when Desdemona promises to help Cassio, Emilia says: "Good madam, do; I warrant it grieves my husband as if the cause were his," and this clearly indicates that though Iago's groundless suspicions could not have

rendered her married life happy, she shared the general opinion as to his honesty and good-nature, and was completely blind to his true character.

Iago carries out his plan, and brings Othello "jump" as Cassio takes his leave of Desdemona and immediately commences with insidious cunning to instil his "poison." Most seemingly honest are his words. After hinting that his mind misgives him as regards Cassio, but declining to say more, he, with well-feigned reluctance, adds—

"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy:
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on."

The suggestion of jealousy takes Othello entirely by surprise, and he exclaims—

"Why! why is this?
Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No; to be once in doubt
Is once to be resolv'd: 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances.
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous;
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt;
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago;
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And on the proof, there is no more but this,—
Away at once with love or jealousy!"

Iago's scheme is apparently failing, but he has complete knowledge of the human instrument upon which he is playing, and Brabantio's warning has been stored in his mind for use on such an occasion as this. He replies—

"I would not have your free and noble nature,
Out of self-bounty, be abused; look to't:
I know our country disposition well;
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.
She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She loved them most."

And conviction comes with memory as Othello whispers
"And so she did."

The "poison" is doing its deadly work, and within a few minutes Othello stoops to the baseness of bidding Iago, "Set on thy wife to observe."

In the first Act the deception practised for love of him by Desdemona appeared to Othello beautiful. Now, with a fear of Cassio eating into his heart, he sees with different eyes. The conduct of Othello in this scene, and generally throughout the remainder of the Act, is only forgivable because he belongs to an inferior race, possessed of inferior intelligence. The civilized, cultured European who would listen to a man, least of all a subordinate, casting doubt upon the honour of his wife, would be a wretch beneath our contempt. Othello had the virtues and defects of the savage races, he was brave, open, simple and credulous as a child, and with passions far beyond his control. He was indeed nearly akin to a noble wild beast, whose blind rage on being robbed of its mate, would be satisfied with nothing but blood, and would tear to pieces, not only its rival, but the fickle mother of its cubs.

Desdemona re-enters and Othello saying he has a pain upon his forehead, she attempts to bind his head with her handkerchief, which he drops. Very touching is Desdemona's tender little expression of regret for the husband, who is doubting her—"I am very sorry that you are not well"—and it was probably her sympathy with, and sorrow for, Othello, that caused her not to notice the loss of the handkerchief. As Emilia picks it up, she enlightens us as to the depth of Iago's plot—

"I am glad I have found this napkin:
This was her first remembrance from the Moor:
My wayward husband hath a hundred times
Woo'd me to steal it; but she so loves the token,
(For he conjured her she should ever keep it),
That she reserves it evermore about her
To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out,
And give't Iago; what he will do with it
Heaven knows, not I;
I nothing but to please his fantasy."

Iago enters, and no sooner gets possession of the "napkin," than we hear his intended use of it: "I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin, and let him find it." It must be borne in mind that Emilia only intended to borrow the napkin, have

the work "ta'en out" for her husband, and to return Othello's gift to her mistress, but Iago's entrance takes her off her guard, and she allows him to trick her out of the original. Othello re-enters "eaten up with passion," the poison is doing its work, and its first fury is spent on Iago—

"If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
On horror's head horrors accumulate;
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed,
For nothing canst thou to damnation add
Greater than that."

Quickly, however, the brilliant intelligence of Iago, regains control of the maddened wild beast, and when Othello demands "some living proof that she's disloyal" Iago concocts the lying story of Cassio's dream, and to confirm it, declares that to-day he saw Cassio wipe his beard with the handkerchief "spotted with strawberries," the Moor's first gift to his wife. "Oh! blood, blood, blood," raves Othello, "I'll tear her all to pieces." Iago is trusted with the murder of Cassio, and with the words "now art thou my lieutenant," Othello retires to obtain "some swift means of death for the fair devil."

In the next scene Desdemona renews her supplications for Cassio, and to Othello racked with jealousy, the mere name of Cassio brings the thought of the handkerchief, and he asks for it.

"I have it not about me," replies Desdemona; and Othello rejoins: "That is a fault, that handkerchief did an Egyptian to my mother give, to lose it or giv't away were such perdition as nothing else could match." "Then would to God that I had never seen't," cries Desdemona, and Othello demands "Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is it o' the way?" Then Desdemona, frightened and startled, lies. "It is not lost; but what an if it were?" "How!" "I say, it is not lost." "Fetch't, let me see't." "Why, so I can, Sir, but I will not now. This is a trick to put me from my suit. Pray you let Cassio be received again." Othello knows Desdemona deceived her father, and when in the next Act he sees the handkerchief in Cassio's hand he knows she has lied to him. He never trusts her again or entertains a doubt of her falseness to him.

When Othello questioned his wife about the handkerchief, she had a last chance of persuading him of her innocence, she did not know her danger, and she lost it.

It must be unnecessary to draw attention to the unwisdom, and utter lack of tact displayed by Desdemona in her advocacy of Cassio's cause, and as she is not depicted as a foolish woman or one lacking in intelligence, this would surprise us did we not know that she was a spoilt child. She had always had her own way, if she were ever refused in the first instance, she went on insisting on her point and always with success, she had been denied nothing. The plan had succeeded with her father, and it did not enter into her mind that it could fail with a doting husband. His suspicions aroused, her persistency maddened Othello, but even at the time of his completest trust, he is compelled to say "I do beseech thee, grant me this, to leave me but a little to myself."

It is also made clear to us that a cause of the final tragedy, was the complete ignorance of husband and wife of each other's character and nature. Desdemona loved the noble, brave, dominating Moor; his complete ignorance of women, above all of the mind and nature of a refined Venetian lady, did not occur to her, and she had no suspicion of the wild beast instincts, only a little way beneath the veneer of civilized culture. During her short married life she found them only too surely; in the last Act, she says "I fear you, for you are fatal then, when your eyes roll so, alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip? Some bloody passion shakes your very frame." Then, however, the end had arrived, knowledge had come too late.

When the fourth Act opens, Iago is still torturing Othello with obscene lies about confessions made by Cassio, and keeping his thoughts fixed upon the handkerchief. The agony is more than Othello can bear, and he falls in a fit. Iago explains to Cassio that "my lord is fall'n into an epilepsy; this is the second fit; he had one yesterday." There is no reason to suppose that Iago was not speaking the truth.

Shakespeare, who seems to have had an instinctive knowledge of everything, was doubtless aware epilepsy is frequently accompanied by homicidal mania, weakening of the brain,

and loss of memory, and the affliction would go far to excuse Othello's bloody thoughts, lack of self-control, and his fine, but curiously inaccurate description of himself in his last speech.

Then follows the scene, witnessed by Othello, who, however, is out of earshot, wherein Cassio laughs and jeers with Iago, at the infatuation with which he has inspired his mistress, Bianca. Othello thinks he is speaking of Desdemona, and when Bianca enters and produces the strawberry spotted handkerchief, which Cassio has found in his lodging, and given her, the success of Iago's plot is complete, Othello cries that he will "chop her (Desdemona) into meshes," and it is again agreed that Iago shall murder Cassio, and also that Desdemona shall be smothered. For a moment Othello hesitates and utters that heartrending regret: "But yet the pity of it, Iago! Oh! Iago, the pity of it, Iago;" but the fiend at his elbow knows how to stifle his remorse, and his hesitation is but momentary. Lodovico arrives with letters from Venice recalling Othello, and "deputing Cassio in his government." "Trust me, I am glad on't," exclaims Desdemona, and Othello, beside himself with rage, strikes her.

Why Othello was recalled we do not know, but it seems probable that the Senate seeing that the "much beloved" Brabantio was dying, wished Desdemona to return hoping that a reconciliation with his daughter might prolong his life.

In the following scene, after endeavouring to secure from Emilia evidence of his wife's faithlessness, Othello attempts to obtain that explanation from Desdemona herself, which he should have sought on the first whisper of a suspicion; it is now too late, she has lied to him and has killed his ability to believe her. We must quote a portion of the dialogue—

Des. Alas the heavy day! Why do you weep?
Am I the motive of these tears, my lord?
If haply you my father do suspect
An instrument of this your calling back,
Lay not your blame on me; if you have lost him,
Why, I have lost him too.

Oth. Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction; had they rain'd
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,

Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience; but, alas, to make me
A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at!
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:
But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!

Des. I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.

Oth. O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,
O thou weed,

Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst n'er been born.

Des. Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?

Oth. What committed!

Committed! O thou public commoner!
I should make very forges of my cheeks
That would to cinders burn up modesty
Did I but speak thy deeds!

In reading this scene it is to be noted that Desdemona here speaks of her father for the only time in the play, and now, only because she thinks him the cause of Othello's displeasure. As we read Othello's lament we wonder whether he thought of the old man he had helped to discard from the loved haven where he had garner'd up *his* heart?

The speech seems to us to answer those critics who contend that Othello's leading motive was the thought of his own honour. He says: "Alas, to make me a fixed figure for the time of scorn to point his slow, unmoving finger at. Yet, could I bear that too, well, very well!"

Surely his overmastering motive was love, fierce, jealous, wild love if you will, but love.

Finally we notice how entirely his imagination has run riot, for nothing that even Iago had suggested would justify him in addressing his wife as a "public commoner."

Emilia endeavours to comfort her mistress, and calls in Iago for help.

Emilia is a perfect foil to Desdemona—honest, true-hearted, fierce in her anger, rather coarse-minded, but a good brave friend. She did her mistress one fatal wrong, but she did it in ignorance of its terrible importance, and under the influence

of her husband. When, too late, she found out what she had done she cried "Let heaven and men and devils, let them all, all, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak." She spoke and willingly atoned for her fault with her life. Only twice in the play is Iago made to wince, and on each occasion it is by the lash of his wife's tongue—in the present scene she scourges her husband in ignorance, as she cries in righteous indignation—

The Moor's abused by some most villanous knave,
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow.
O heaven, that such companions thou'ldst unfold
And put in every honest hand a whip
To lash the rascals naked through the world,
Even from the east to the west!

Iago. Speak within door.

Emil. O, fie upon them! Some such squire he was
That turned your wit the seamy side without,
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

Iago. You are a fool; go to.

Des. O, good Iago,

What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel:
If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears or any sense,
Delighted them in any other form;
Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
And ever will—though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement—love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much;
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love.

Nothing in a play full of passages that tug as the heart-strings is more pathetic than the picture presented by this speech of the gentle child-wife to whom harshness is unknown, trembling before the anger of the man she worships, not knowing her offence, but blindly clinging to her love.

After an interview between Iago and Roderigo, in which the latter gives evidence of getting out of hand, and Iago unfolds to him a plot to murder Cassio, we pass to a room in the Castle where Desdemona is unrobing for the night, Othello having commanded her to "get to bed" and to dismiss

her attendant—this scene being used to again emphasize the contrast between Desdemona's childlike purity and Emilia's bluntly spoken wordly-wisdom.

The last act opens in a Street—it is night, and Iago and Roderigo take their stand waiting for Cassio, who is to be killed as he leaves Bianca's house.

This scene has always appeared to us the one blot on an otherwise almost absolutely perfect play. In the original story the lieutenant (or captain) is killed, and we cannot but think Shakespeare made a mistake in altering this incident. Cassio's death is of such vital importance to Iago, that we cannot believe that man of genius would have made such a sorry bungle of so simple a business as Shakespeare allows him to do. Cassio is not needed to aid the *dénouement* and we have no care whatever concerning his fate, but we should have wished our admiration for Iago's intellect to have remained unimpaired, and surely the interest in the final scene would have been heightened if Iago had entered Desdemona's bedchamber in secure triumph, and in the belief that all witnesses he needed to fear had been "removed," only to be check-mated and exposed by a despised woman, his own wife. As the play stands he is, of course, denounced by Emilia, but the effect of this is weakened by our knowledge that Cassio lives, and that Iago's exposure is unavoidable.

It appears as tho' with the completion and success of his villainous plot Shakespeare had lost interest in Iago, for in this last Act he is but a shadow of his former self. As he waits with Roderigo for Cassio, he soliloquises—

"I have rubb'd this young quat almost to the sense,
And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain: live Roderigo,
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels that I bobb'd from him,
As gifts to Desdemona;
It must not be: if Cassio do remain,
He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly; and, besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him; there stand I in much peril:
No, he must die."

We pause a moment as we reflect upon the ruin of Roderigo's soul, under the influence of Iago. In the first Act, simple and weak as he was, his honest love for Desdemona saved him from contempt—Iago has laughed him out of every pure thought, and in the fifth Act he is merely a vicious, cowardly cut-throat.

Cassio wears armour under his jerkin, and Roderigo's attack on him fails, Roderigo himself being badly wounded. Iago slashes Cassio in the leg and rushes out, returning after a brief interval, doubtless with the intention of finishing both his victims. Their cries have, however, attracted others, and although he kills Roderigo, he does not succeed in being left alone with Cassio, who thus escapes. Even then the astute Iago does not realise that the "game is up," for as he goes out he says—

"This is the night that either makes me or fordoes me quite."

The last scene opens with the murder of poor Desdemona. Othello tells her of Cassio's supposed confession and that he has seen her handkerchief in his hand. He absolutely disbelieves her protestations of innocence, and when she weeps on hearing of Cassio's supposed murder all the wild beast in the Moor's nature is quickened by his raging jealousy, her prayers for mercy pass unheeded, and her piteous cries are smothered in the pillows heaped upon her beautiful, innocent face.

Emilia knocks and demands admittance, and there follow the wonderful lines—

"If she comes in, she'll sure speak to my wife:
My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife."

Emilia enters to tell of Roderigo's murder and hears a whisper—

"Oh! falsely, falsely murdered."

In an agony of fear she rushes to the bed, bends over the dying girl, and entreats—

"Oh! lady, speak again!
Sweet Desdemona! Oh, sweet mistress, speak!"

Desdemona gasps—

"A guiltless death I die."

"Oh! who hath done this deed?" wails Emilia, and with an expiring effort of supreme love the murdered wife replies—

"Nobody; I myself. Farewell.
Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell."

"You heard her say herself, it was not I," says Othello, and Emilia replies: "She said so: I must needs report the truth;" then Othello exclaims "She's, like a liar, gone to burning hell: 'twas I that kill'd her."

Now in putting those inhuman words into Othello's mouth, Shakespeare had no intention of depriving him of all sympathy, but he wished to fix upon our minds the fact that the Moor was so imbued with his wife's lack of truth that her dying act of love for him, only appealed to his distraught mind as a final proof of her false nature. Emilia's cries bring into the room Iago, Desdemona's kinsman Gratiano, and Montano. Othello accuses his dead wife of infidelity, and speaks of the handkerchief as giving proof of this, and Emilia, fearless of her husband, as she had been of the Moor, tells how she found and gave the napkin to Iago, who in his impotent rage stabs her and she dies with her mistress. Othello wounds Iago, though whether mortally or whether he lives to die on the rack, we do not know. To Lodovico's question: "O thou, Othello, that was once so good, what shall be said to thee," Othello answers: "Why anything: an honourable murderer if you will; for nought I did in hate, but all in honour," and as he is about to be led away a prisoner he speaks again—

"Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't;
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;

And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus.
I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this;
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss."

And he dies beside the girl wife, who had loved him with such gentle tender devotion.

We say again, however, that Othello was incapable of forming a correct judgment either of his own character, or of the characters of others, added to which, epilepsy may have impaired his memory of recent events. It is impossible to think he was "one not easily jealous," though possibly he might never have succumbed to the madness had he escaped Iago's fiendish "poison."

His claim that he did "all in honour," would actually cause us to laugh, were our pity for him less. We think of his thirst for blood, of his suggestion to set on Emilia to spy, of his striking his wife, of the eavesdropping, and of the assassin's plot to "remove" Cassio.

Honour forsooth!

Until maddened by jealousy he was a noble, simple, semi-civilized barbarian, loving Desdemona utterly; but once mastered by jealousy he had as little self-control as a wild beast, and would have torn Desdemona to pieces if honour had been an "essense" of which he had no knowledge.

Heaven's retribution is accomplished, and it is over the dead body of the daughter, that Gratiano tells of the death of Brabantio.

"Poor Desdemon! I am glad thy father's dead:
Thy match was mortal to him and pure grief
Shore his old thread in twain."

We close the book, but there will ever live in our memories the sad story of the gentle Desdemona, of the noble credulous Moor, of fearless outspoken Emilia, and of the weak foolish Roderigo, all "fallen in the practice of a cursed slave."

But perhaps our completest sympathy, and our saddest thoughts are with the lonely old man in his Venetian palace, sitting alone day after day, week after week, gazing at Desdemona's empty chair, thinking of the child who once

played about his knees, longing to again feel her little arms about his neck, her little lips against his cheek, thinking despairingly—

"There where I have garner'd up my heart
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!"

Thinking, till he could bear the grief no longer, till his brave heart broke, and he died.